

### 3. Guidelines for Signs

2021-12-30

*Note: Language from the Board's draft of rules update is highlighted in yellow.*

*Specific questions in blue text.*

#### a. General Information

Maybe a photo of a good, historic sign

The Pioneer Square Preservation Ordinance reflects a policy to focus on structures, individually and collectively, so that they can be seen and appreciated. Sign proliferation or inconsistent paint colors, for example, are incompatible with this focus, and are expressly to be avoided. (8/93)

At the same time, signs are an important part of the District's character and can enhance or diminish an existing building's historical authenticity and a new building's visual compatibility with its surroundings. Many of the district's signs are one-of-a-kind, custom fabricated and/or artworks. One traditional characteristic of many of the District's signs are that they fit with the building's architectural elements in terms of location and orientation to surrounding architectural elements, imagery and type styles, and materials.

The Pioneer Square Preservation Ordinance reflects a policy to focus on structures, individually and collectively, so that they can be seen and appreciated. Sign proliferation or inconsistent paint colors, for example, are incompatible with this focus, and are expressly to be avoided. (8/93)

All signs on or hanging from buildings, in windows, or applied to windows, are subject to review and approval by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board. (8/93) Locations for signs shall be in accordance with all other regulations for signage. (12/94)

The intent of sign regulations is to ensure that signs relate physically and visually to their location; that signs not hide, damage, or obscure the architectural elements of the building; that signs be oriented toward and promote a pedestrian environment; and that the products or services offered be the focus of business-related signs.

Signs are addressed in the following categories:

- Permanent building signs - that are often part of the building façade, such as a sign on a cornice in the same materials of the cornice itself.
- Business signs - which identify an individual business, are usually located on or above the ground floor. These include blade signs and sign bands.
- Window signs located within the window area.
- Upper story signs, which are not allowed except as described below.
- Directories - pedestrian scaled plaques or kiosks that list the businesses or occupants located within the building.

- Wall signs
  - Sandwich board signs
  - Other miscellaneous signs and banners, usually of a temporary nature,
- Neon light elements are discussed as parts of the sign types identified above.

#### **a. General sign guidelines**

##### Rationale, Context, and Intent

The intent of the guidelines below is to establish standards that pertain to all signs and signage in general.

##### Guidelines

- i. The number, location and type of signs must be considered as a composition. That is, the design character of the signs should not clash with one another; the signs must not overlap, compete with, or duplicate one another, and each sign should be directed to a unique purpose or viewpoint. The Board may require that the applicant submit a sign package for approval that illustrates all the signs proposed for the buildings or business's façade.
- ii. Number of signs. There shall be a limit of one projecting element, e.g., a blade sign, banner, or awning per address. If a business chooses awnings for its projecting element, it may not also have a blade sign, flag, or banner, and no additional signage may be hung below awnings. (6/03) Exceptions may be made for businesses on corners, in which case one projecting element per facade may be permitted. (12/94)
- iii. There shall no new flashing, scrolling, or moving signs in the District. Nor shall there be electronic signs using a technology that was not available during the District's era of significance. Exception. LED and other energy saving luminaires are acceptable if they do not provide a quality of lighting (such as bright, highly focused spotlighting) that was not available during the District's era of significance.
- iv. New signs shall not cover over architectural features of Contributing or Historic buildings. They may be incorporated into a building's façade where there is a façade element, such as a sign band, that is fashioned to accomplish that purpose.
- v. Neon and similar lighting are permitted only as signage and shall not be used as decorative building trim. (8/93). Neon artwork and logos are permitted as part of window or blade signs if the Board finds that they are appropriate for the context.

#### **b. Permanent Building signs**

##### Rationale, Context, and Intent

Permanent building signs are those that identify the name of the building and are integrally part of the building's façade. Generally, they are constructed of durable materials and are built into the building itself.

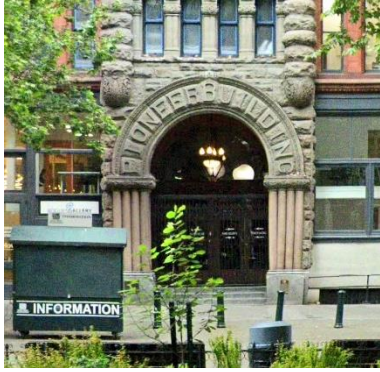


Figure \_\_. A building sign

### Guidelines

- i. General. Existing building signs on Contributing and Historic Buildings shall not be altered or removed.
- ii. Location. New permanent building signs shall be integrated into the building façade (generally, but not always, near the roof line or just above the ground floor or mezzanine level) and not extend above the building façade's top or parapet. The name of a building may also be displayed on the sign band (see section "d" below) or on a plaque or "medallion" less than 2 square feet in area.



Figure \_\_. A building plaque of "medallion" shown here may also be used to indicate a buildings name.

- iii. Dimensions. The dimensions of new building signs shall be as approved by the Board and shall be no larger than **60 SF as measured by a rectangle encompassing the sign. The Board may allow a departure from this area limit for an unusual circumstance where there is a compelling reason.**
- iv. Illumination. New building signs shall not be internally illuminated or include neon lighting.
- v. Lettering. Lettering shall be as approved by the Board and be no more 20" in height if the sign is located along the building cornice and is greater than 35' above grade. Otherwise, the lettering shall be no more than 10" in height unless there is a demonstrated need to view the sign from greater than 100' away.

- vi. Color and Materials. The sign shall be constructed of the materials of the façade on which it is located. (e.g.: building signs on a masonry building should be constructed of a material that is similar in nature to masonry, such as cast or carved stone). Sign colors shall be the same as the façade materials and as approved by the board. All materials shall be permanent and maintenance.
- vii. Other. Permanent building signs may not advertise a specific business, although they may indicate a public institution such as a post office or governmental offices.

### c. Blade Signs

#### Rationale, Context, and Intent

Blade signs are signs that project out perpendicularly from a building façade and are supported by or hung from horizontal brackets. Usually, they identify a business, organization, or activity. They are often prominent features on Contributing and Historic buildings. [Blade signs installed above the first floor or mezzanine level are also upper story signs and must comply with provisions for blade and upper story signs.](#)

Signs made of fabric or flexible material and hung perpendicularly from the building as in a rigid blade sign are also considered blade signs.



*Figure \_\_\_\_ . A traditional blade sign with neon.*



*Figure \_\_\_\_ > A contemporary blade sign with neon*

## Guidelines

- i. General.
- ii. Location. Blade signs shall be installed below the second floor of the building, and in such a manner that they do not hide, damage, or obscure the architectural elements of the building.
- iii. Dimensions. non-illuminated blade signs are limited to eight (8) square feet. (12/94)
- iv. Illumination. Blade signs incorporating neon of any kind shall not be permitted unless all the following conditions are met:
  - the neon blade sign is sought as part of a reduced overall sign package or plan for the business.
  - Neon blade signs shall be limited to six (8) square feet in dimension with letters not to exceed eight (8) inches in height.
  - Electrical connection from exterior walls to the blade sign shall be made using rigid, paintable electrical tubing painted to match the building facade and all bends shall closely follow the support structure.
  - The wiring and connections shall be internal to the sign and not be visible
  - All neon elements shall be supported by a rigid, opaque backing and framework. (See Figure \_\_\_\_ of a contemporary blade sign for a positive example.):
  - LED lights may be approved provided they produce the same visual character of lights common in the District's period of significance.
- v. Lettering. Letter size in blade signs shall be consistent with the scale of the architectural elements of the building (as per SMC 23.66.160) but shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches unless an exception has been approved by the Board. Exceptions to the 10-inch height limitation will be considered for individual letters in the business name (subject to a limit of no more than three letters) only if both of the following conditions are satisfied:
  - The exception is sought as part of a reduced overall sign package or plan for the business; and
  - The size of the letters for which an exception is requested is consistent with the scale and character of the building, the frontage of the business, the transparency requirements of the regulations, and all other conditions under SMC 23.66.160. An overall sign package or plan will be considered reduced for purposes of the exception if it calls for approval of signage that is substantially less than what would otherwise be allowable under the regulations. (12/94)
- vi. Color and Materials. Blade signs on Contributing and Historic buildings shall be made of materials that were available during the era of significance such as wood, glass, and metal. Painted opaque, panel materials such as rigid polymer panels may also be acceptable if the finishes visually resemble the materials noted above and are approved by the Board.

- vii. Signs made of fabric or flexible material and hung perpendicularly from the building are permitted provided that the material is durable, and the colors are not subject to rapid fading. Such signs must be supported top and bottom with a rigid mounting.
- viii. All signage supports shall be fastened to the exterior wall using metal anchors at existing grout joints only; and g) the sign taken as a whole is consistent with the scale and character of the building, the transparency requirements of the regulations, and all other conditions under SMC 23.66.160. An overall sign package or plan will be considered reduced for purposes of the exception, if it calls for approval of signage that is substantially less than what would otherwise be allowable under regulations. (5/96)



Figure\_\_\_\_. An example of an appropriate blade sign made of fabric.

#### **d. Sign Bands**

##### Rationale, Context, and Intent

A sign band is an area located on some buildings in the zone above storefront windows and below second floor windows designed to display signage. (7/99) The intent of this provision is to allow attractive signs consistent with the character and architectural features of the building; and also to provide inviting announcement of the business or activity.

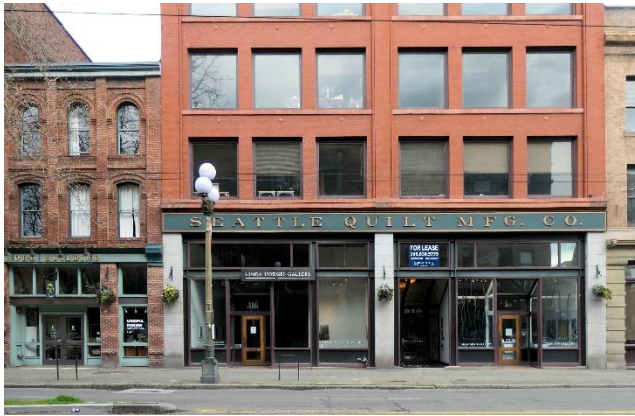


Figure \_\_\_, Two sign bands, note the locations, subdued colors, and variation in size.

##### Guidelines

- i. General. Sign bands are permitted where there is a horizontal area between the first and second floors to accommodate a sign band. Such an area is sometimes called a first-floor cornice or lintel.
- ii. Location. Above the storefront and below the second floor windows only.
- iii. Dimensions. maximum height shall be 24 inches high unless otherwise approved by the Board.
- iv. Illumination. Exterior illumination is permitted. Internally lit sign bands are not permitted. Exception: On new buildings constructed since 2020, back-lit, glowing letters on an opaque panel may be permitted subject to approval by the Board.
- v. Lettering. Maximum height is 18 inches unless otherwise approved by the board.
- vi. Color and Materials. Materials must be durable. Materials for Contributing and Historic buildings shall be made of materials that were available during the era of significance such as wood, glass, and metal. Painted opaque, panel materials such as rigid polymer panels may also be acceptable visually similar to the traditional materials and if approved by the Board.

#### **e. Window Signs**

##### Rationale, Context, and Intent



Window signs are semi-permanent signs affixed directly to a window. The intent of window sign guidelines is to provide for pedestrian oriented signage without modifying the architecture of a building and allowing visibility into the commercial space.

### Guidelines

- i. General. Window signs subject to Board approval and must comply with transparency requirements in 1.e.i-v and 2.e.i.a).
- ii. Location. Window signs must not be located above the ground floor **except in limited circumstances where necessary for wayfinding (See Section g.below)** . Except for neon signs advertising products served in the business, only one window sign is permitted per a business's façade. Buildings on street corners may have two window signs: one for each side of the building. Additional window signs on alleys may be permitted.
- iii. Dimensions. Signs mounted in windows must allow people see what the business offers inside as well as maintain a visual connection from the inside to the outside and be compliant with the Transparency Guidelines. In no case should any window be covered more than 25% with signage.  
**ALTERNATE** In no case should any window sign cover more than 4 square feet in area, as measured by the sign's surface coverage, excluding any transparent area within the sign's design.



Figure\_\_\_\_. A typical window sign *(does this meet the guidelines??)*

- iv. Neon lighting elements in windows may be approved subject to the following:



- The wiring and connections shall be internal to the sign and not be visible.
- The number of neon signs shall be limited to one for each 10 linear feet of business frontage for the first forty feet of business, and one for each additional 15 feet of frontage for businesses over forty feet. For a business that has transom windows beginning at ten (10) feet above the sidewalk, one additional neon sign may be allowed for every 30 feet of frontage if located within the transom windows. Neon signs need not be spaced one per ten feet, but may be clustered, provided the maximum number of approved signs is not exceeded and the grouping does not obscure visibility into the business. Permitted neon signs may be located in transom windows, according to the guidelines contained in this section. (12/94)

When a business is on a corner and has at least 10 linear feet (measured horizontally) of glazing on the secondary facade, additional neon signs are permitted for the secondary facade as on the basis stated in the above paragraph for the primary facade. (12/94.

- v. Lettering. Lettering shall be no higher than 10 inches, although artwork and non-corporate logos may be larger.
- vi. Color and Materials. Window signs must not be susceptible to fading or deterioration. Paint and gold leaf are generally acceptable, as are vinyl film and other durable synthetic products, subject to iii above and vii below. .
- vii. Businesses, tenants, and building owners must comply with the requirements above. However, if a storefront is vacant and/or the interior of the space is under construction, temporary window coverings may be approved by the Board. In such cases window signs, films or other coverings must be removed upon occupancy.

## **f. Banners and Flags**

### Rationale, Context, and Intent

Banners and flags are semi-permanent signs that are generally constructed of flexible materials. They are located and attached on buildings to be easily removable daily. Signs constructed of flexible materials such as fabric that are mounted permanently on a building are blade signs covered in Section c.

The intent of guidelines for banners and flags is to allow signs and displays that do not detract from a building's architectural quality but do promote businesses, events, and sports teams while adding to the streetscape's visual interest.

The US and Washington State flags are not subject to these guidelines if they are properly and respectfully displayed.

### Guidelines

- i. General flags and banners must be removed from the building face at the close of business daily. Flags and banners shall not have any text on them, and the size of the flag or banner must be consistent with the character and scale of the building, the frontage of the business, and the scale of surrounding buildings. Banners (either temporary or permanent) that are draped across buildings are prohibited.
- ii. Location: Banners and flags shall not be mounted above the first floor.
- iii. Dimensions: Banners and flags shall not exceed 6 feet in the longest dimension and shall not be larger in area than 18 square feet.
- iv. Illumination. Banners and flags shall not be illuminated.
- v. Lettering: Lettering is not allowed unless part of a logo or symbol.
- vi. Color and Materials: Banners and flags must consist of durable, flexible material and securely mounted to avoid creating a hazard.
- vii. Other

## **g. Upper Story Signs and Directories**

### Rationale, Context, and Intent

Upper story signs are located above the first floor and do not include permanent building signs, which are considered under Section b. Where upper story businesses and other activities require signage provide signage at ground level, if possible. If there are multiple businesses requiring pedestrian oriented signage, provide a directory that indicates the location and type of services provided by businesses and activities that do not have at grade street front exposure.

There are some limited circumstances where upper-level signage may be necessary to provide wayfinding to businesses, government facilities and services for people who may not be familiar with the District. In those cases, the Board may consider upper-level signs in accordance with the guidelines below.



*Example of a directory*

#### Guidelines

- i. General: Signage located on upper floors is not permitted, except for:
  - a) temporary signage as per SMC 23.66.160D or
  - b) When it is the name of the building. (7/99) (See Section b. Permanent Building Signs.)
  - c) **When the applicant demonstrates to the Board's satisfaction that it is necessary to provide wayfinding for people not familiar with the District. In this case the sign must meet all the requirements below:**
    - The sign must not cover the façade's architectural features but be located on an otherwise flat and unadorned portion of the façade or situated in a window.
    - Window signs must meet the provisions for window signs. Opaque or translucent window coverings are not allowed. One neon window sign per business may be allowed
    - Signs mounted on upper story building facades may not be internally lit or include neon lighting.
    - Upper story bracket (blade) signs may be allowed if it is not possible to incorporate window signs or signs directly on the building façade.

- The lettering must not be greater than 12 inches in height
  - Upper story building signs must be constructed of permanent, high quality materials that are edged and finished in a workmanlike manner.
  - An upper story building sign's colors must be subdued and complement the building's façade's colors. as determined by the Board.
  - Because the need for wayfinding of upper story activities is a special condition, the design, materials mounting, and construction of the proposed sign must be of highest quality, as determined by the Board.
- i. Location: Directories are to be located on the ground floor, roughly at eye level.
  - ii. Dimensions: A directory sign for an individual building tenant, business, or activity shall not be greater than 1 square foot.
  - iii. Illumination: Directories must not be back lit. Front lighting from an external source is acceptable
  - iv. Lettering. Lettering shall not be larger than 6 inches in height
  - v. Color and Materials: Directories must be made of durable, vandal resistant materials.

## Wall Signs and Murals

### Rationale, Context, and Intent

Wall signs are signs that are attached to a non-street facing wall or a wall without ground floor windows. Properly located, designed, and constructed wall signs can add interest to otherwise blank wall surfaces. Murals are images (generally painted) and affixed to walls but do not serve as a sign to a business. The intent of these guidelines is to permit well designed and constructed wall signs in appropriate locations on existing buildings.

### Guidelines

- i. **General:** Wall signs are only allowed on buildings constructed before January 2020. The rationale for this provision is that opportunities for signage within new buildings can be integrated into the building in a number of ways without requiring a wall sign.
- ii. **No wall signs with moving images, or billboards for products are allowed.-No wall signs for products or off premise businesses are allowed.**
- iii. **Location:** Wall signs are only allowed where the primary purpose is for pedestrian way-finding for a business that provides service to walk-in customers (such as a bank, retail shop, salon, or restaurant) and generally only on first or second floor facades. A wall sign must relate to or direct pedestrians to the business entrance. **Wall signs may be permitted on ground or second floors of building facades adjacent to and facing an alley.** The board may allow wall signs in other locations where necessary for pedestrian orientation.
- iv. **Wallsigns are only permitted where they do not cover or change architectural features such as windows, entries, storefronts, pilasters, etc.**
- v. **Dimensions:** Wall signs shall be sized to be compatible with the character of the district as determined by the Board. Generally, wall signs should be no larger than 240 square feet in total area. The area of wall signs must also not exceed 10% of the façade area.
- vi. **Illumination:** Wall signs shall not be internally lit. Wall signs may be externally lit to a light level of 1 foot candle/square foot.
- vii. **Lettering:** **letter sizes shall be appropriately scaled to fit the overall design and dimensions of the sign,** as determined by the Board.
- viii. **Color and Materials:** **Wall signs shall be painted on a wood, metal or permanent panel backing and attached in such a manner that the building surface is not damaged. Colors and graphics of wall signs shall be compatible with the character of the District,** as determined by the Board.
- ix. **Murals. Murals that do not specifically relate to a business are not permitted.**



*Figure \_\_\_\_ Example of an appropriate wall sign.*

## ***STOPPED HERE***

### **I. Awning, Canopy and Hanging Signs**

#### Rationale, Context, and Intent

This section addresses signs on or attached to pedestrian weather protection elements including fabric awnings, structural canopies, and similar devices. The intent is to permit well designed and constructed signs on these elements that are consistent with a building's architecture, other signs on the building and the District's character.



*Figure \_\_\_\_ . An example of an acceptable awning sign (left) and a canopy sign (right).*

#### Guidelines

- i. General: Awning and canopy signs must name the business, organization, or activity. Logos and graphics are permitted if the Board determines that they do not detract from the character of the building or the District.



- ii. Location: Signs on canopies or awnings must be on the vertical surface and not extend above or below the front of the awning's vertical surface.
- iii. Dimensions: The sign must fit within the dimensions of the canopy's or awning's vertical surface
- iv. Illumination: No illumination is allowed. Backlit awnings are specifically prohibited.
- v. Lettering **Maximum 10" tall**.
- vi. Color, Materials and Construction: Materials must be durable and easily maintainable

## II. Sandwich Board Signs and Other Signs Located in the Public Right of Way

### Rationale, Context, and Intent

Sandwich board or "A-Board" signs are small, self-supporting, and portable signs located on sidewalks constructed of two panels which advertise a business and are located directly in front of that business. The intent is to allow well designed and constructed sandwich board signs that are located where they do not impede pedestrian movement.



Figure \_\_\_\_\_. An example of a sandwich board or A-board sign

### Guidelines

- vii. General: When multiple businesses, including upper floor businesses, share a common entrance, a single shared sandwich board sign may be allowed in lieu of multiple, individual signs. Such signs shall be limited to one per entrance to the shared location. (7/03)

Businesses located on side streets in a one block area to the east and west of 1st Ave. S. may share one sandwich board sign to be placed at the corner of 1st Ave. S. and the side street on which their businesses are located. The shared corner sandwich board sign must be located next to the corner building face and must not impair pedestrian flow. Businesses located on side streets that choose to share one corner sandwich board sign may have one additional sandwich board sign located in front of their businesses. (7/03) Shared corner sandwich board signs shall display a standardized format and be consistent in design, color, and typeface.

Sandwich board signs shall occupy the sidewalk only during business hours and cannot be chained to trees, parking meters, etc. (12/94) They shall also comply with all other regulations for signs in Pioneer Square. (12/94)

- viii. Location: Sandwich board signs shall be located directly in front of the business frontage either next to the building face or at the street side of the sidewalk by newsstands, streetlights, or other amenities. Signs shall not impair pedestrian flow. (12/94). Sandwich board signs shall be limited to one per address.
  - ix. Dimensions: Sandwich board signs shall be a minimum of two feet high and a maximum of four feet high and be a maximum of two- and one-half feet wide; (12/94)
  - x. Illumination: Sandwich board signs shall not be illuminated or otherwise electrified. They are prohibited from containing neon in any form. (12/94)
  - xi. Lettering Letter size is restricted to 10 inches in height. (7/03)
  - xii. Color, Materials and Construction: Sandwich boards must be a free-standing A-frame type sign to allow a horizontal component such as a chain or bar to hold the sign in place the chain or bar must be between 3 to 8 inches above the ground and secured on all four sides to accommodate high winds and sight impaired persons. (12/94).
- Sandwich Board signs shall be constructed of durable, rigid materials such as wood or polymer panels. If not constructed of wood, the signs must be painted or finished to look like wood.
- xiii. Other: Prior to submitting an application to the Board, the applicant must have the consent of the property owner.
  - xiv. Temporary or permanent signs on or in outdoor cafes and seating areas, such as signs hung on railings are prohibited.



Figure \_\_\_\_ . Example of a sign hung on a café seating area. This type of sign is prohibited.